

Psalm 131 - Littlebourne 27 November 2022

A song of ascents. Of David.

¹ My heart is not proud, LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. ² But I have calmed and quietened myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. ³ Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and for evermore.

Whatever the occasion was, - and we can think of occasions when David was accused of being ambitious and proud of his accomplishments - this short psalm is a beautiful denial of pride, arrogance, and selfish ambition. **“It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ.”** (Charles Spurgeon). Charles Spurgeon wrote a long sermon on “The weaned child” – a better sermon than this will ever be, but about ten times longer. Look it up for homework if you have the time.

David wrote this psalm and his life was one where he showed himself to be a man after God’s own heart because he was not proud, not ambitious, not haughty and content with his station in life, though he may have been accused falsely of being proud and ambitious by jealous men. Yes, David made a big mistake with Uriah the Hittite’s wife, Bathsheba, but he recognised it, repented and God rewarded him with a son of great wisdom who made Israel the kingdom that, if its people remained faithful to God, it should have remained for centuries, if not millennia. So jumping to the last verse *“Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and for evermore”* was what could have happened but for one thing: sin that lives in every man’s heart from Adam onwards. The Bible is a record of man’s sinfulness and how God has dealt with that. The psalm sums up how we should live to overcome sin. I’ll come to the weaned child simile later.

There are three places where it is written “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” - Proverbs 3:34 translated in the NIV says *“He mocks proud mockers but shows favour to the humble and oppressed”* and the King James *“Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly”*.

Directly translated from the Greek in the New Testament it says “God arrogant men resists, but to humble men he gives grace” in the same words in both James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, so they probably got this from the Septuagint Greek translation rather than the Hebrew original, which refers to those who exalt themselves. Another reference of this same point is in Mary’s song Luke 1:50-52 - *His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.*

So David doesn’t see himself among the proud, the mockers, those who exalt themselves, and think themselves better than others. Pride in ourselves is all too common... even those who have nothing at all to be proud of, can see themselves as self important, proud of themselves even in the smallest achievement because it’s built into our nature. David had a lot to be proud of – he was a brave youth, able to stand up to Goliath; he was a warrior brave in battle; he was an inspired leader who men followed even when things got really bad, he was loyal – when he could have killed Saul in the cave of Adullam – and he became king and was rich. And still he said he was not proud nor haughty. We see that he wasn’t greedy or unwilling to recognise the part played by the lesser men as opposed to the greater men. He shared with his men all that was taken even when 200 of the 600 were left behind too tired to go on and fight (1 Samuel 30). This established a principle that all would share alike whatever part they played in an enterprise against the enemy; those who stayed in the camp got the same as those in the battle. He was willing to accept teaching, when Nathan the prophet spoke to him about the injustice of the poor man having his only sheep stolen by a rich

man (2 Samuel 12). David demanded the death penalty for this wickedness and when he was told that Uriah the Hittite was that poor man and he the rich man, he knew he deserved that punishment himself for what he had done. He was forgiven, because God is merciful towards those who confess their sins. None of us can justify our sins because we all know, having a conscience, what is right and what is wrong. Indeed there is a lot of blurring of what is right and wrong these days, with self justification and excuses for sinfulness, because allegedly what is done “doesn’t harm anyone”. Harm to oneself is harm, and sins don’t have to be committed against other people: just thinking sinful things is sinful. Set against God’s standard of holiness we all fall short and none of us can justify ourselves. Thankfully we have Jesus to accept the punishment we deserve, and so we are set free from having to pay the price of our transgressions.

The next phrase says *“I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.”* King David had great matters to deal with in his life, but with hindsight they were dealt with as they arose and he managed to arrive at the right solutions most of the time. But these “great matters” are more than just daily problems that need solving. They are the speculations and theories and propositions that theologians over the centuries have struggled with and again if we look with hindsight, much has been written and much has been debated and much has said without anything changing at all in the meaning of the Word of God. David was a practical man. What good is the accumulation of a great amount of knowledge on things that have little or no bearing on our relationship with God? When it comes to loving people, would an encyclopaedic knowledge of the nature of love help one to love someone better than simply loving them? God is love. Love we can understand if we have been loved, and if we love others as ourselves. This leads into verse 2 *“But I have calmed and quietened myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content.”* A child is dependent on its mother. Whatever troubles a child can be calmed by its mother to whom it goes to be comforted. There is no intellectual discourse needed to understand this simple observed reality. The relationship we have with God and He with us is one of love. The verses quoted earlier in 1 Peter 5:5-7 say *“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble’.* ⁶*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.* ⁷*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

For us to cast all our fears, anxiety and cares on Jesus, is being like the weaned child coming to its mother who cares for it. This applies to everyone, no matter what station in life – from a king like David to the lowliest servant doing menial work. David knew about menial work – looking after sheep is work with responsibility that isn’t intellectually challenging and may result in losing sheep who’ve gone astray for which blame will attach. We don’t know if David ever lost any sheep, but his father Jesse would probably have comforted him rather than scolded him, knowing that he will have searched far and wide for the lost sheep. David did his best for his people, and needed that assurance that God was on his side and by his side. He could come to God like a child and know the comfort of welcoming arms, the assurance of love, and mercy when mistakes were made.

“Weaning takes the child out of a temporary condition into a state in which he will continue for the rest of his life: to rise above the world is to enter upon a heavenly existence which can never end.” (Spurgeon)

Contentment is something that so many restless people seem unable to find. Finding rest and contentment comes from not becoming agitated with the concern for great matters and things we cannot change or handle or even understand. Getting upset is not the answer - praying about them for God to deal with is more fruitful and takes away the upset. Casting our cares on Jesus has a calming effect. We know that some psalms have anger, fear, and sorrow in them, but all point back to God as the one who is able to deal with every situation. Being like a weaned child and content is a better state than being worked up about things you cannot change, have no means of changing, for which you have no responsibility and in matters in which you should not interfere. God wants us to rest in Him, and be content that He is in control, whatever the circumstances.

Hebrews 4: 9-16 ⁹ *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. ¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven¹ Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

We can put our trust in God. David writes ³ *Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and for evermore.*

That was David's prayer. Sadly Israel put her hope in other gods and her people decided they didn't need to rely on God but preferred to do whatever they wanted. The same applies to us today. Yet the promise remains God loves the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and there are still many who will read this psalm and praise God. They too know Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ⁴ *Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.*

Many churches will have the ten commandments on a board inside the church. Many Jewish homes have the ten commandments on their door posts, often fairly small and just readable but others will pay lip service to verse 9 by satisfying its requirement by having the ten commandments written on a tiny piece of paper, rolled up and inserted in a pinhole of your doorpost – the so called mezzuzah. Not quite what God had in mind!

What can we take home from this psalm?

Be humble

Do not seek the adulation of men, but rather of God

Do not be side tracked thinking about things too obscure and difficult to understand if they take your focus off your relationship with Jesus

Keep short account with God – repent and put on the full armour of God because the god of this world wants to distract us

Rest in the love of God

Trust in God

Remember all Jesus has done for us